

The Intellectual and Architectural Legacy of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila: Guardians of Knowledge and Information Retrieval

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Abstract:

This article examines the evolution of libraries at India's ancient educational centres Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila and their significance in India's intellectual history. Renowned for their vast knowledge repositories, these institutions played a crucial role in preserving and disseminating information across different eras and regions. By analyzing these libraries' architectural elements and construction methods, the study demonstrates how they safeguarded documents and facilitated access to information, thus promoting an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The study also explores the influence of these ancient libraries on modern library design and management, highlighting their enduring impact on contemporary library science and literature. By examining various literary and historical records, this paper underscores the rich heritage of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila, illustrating their contributions to the development of global knowledge systems and their importance in pursuing intellectual advancement.

Keywords: Ancient Education, Knowledge Preservation, Architectural Marvels, Manuscript Preservation, Holistic Education, Library Architecture, Enduring Legacy, Knowledge Dissemination, Ancient Scholarship

Introduction:

Ancient educational centres architectural wonders remain an enduring testament to humanity's constant pursuit of knowledge and competence. Nalanda, Taxila, Vikramashila, and other such centres were once great hubs of discovery, attracting philosophers, students, and knowledge seekers worldwide. At the heart of these renowned educational institutions were their libraries, filled with manuscripts and books that served as treasure troves of knowledge, nurturing the minds of those thirsty for learning. These libraries were more than mere repositories of books and codices; they embodied the quest for information and the spirit of intellectual creativity. This study examines the architectural evolution of library buildings in these ancient educational centres. By analyzing how the design and construction of these libraries have changed over time, we can understand the inter-connectedness of architecture, information retrieval, and the transmission of knowledge through the ages.

This study aims to explore the construction of library buildings at Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila. The unique architectural and structural features of these libraries facilitated the preservation of information, the exchange of ideas, and the enhancement of ancient educational systems. The architectural features not only aided in the archival of documents but also played a crucial role in information retrieval, transforming how researchers accessed the vast reservoirs of knowledge. This paper

will take you on a journey through time, illustrating how the architecture of these libraries evolved, thus providing insights into the changing landscape of education and knowledge dissemination during their periods of prosperity.

Each library, from Nalanda's serene gardens to Taxila's remote settings, reflects how its time's culture, history, and philosophy influenced knowledge storage. This study will also highlight current efforts to preserve these historical gems, ensuring their legacy for future generations. Additionally, it will examine how the architectural designs of these ancient libraries have significantly influenced modern library design, demonstrating the lasting impact of historical ideas on contemporary practices. Exploring these ancient libraries and understanding their architectural evolution is more than a historical journey; it is an opportunity to reflect on the enduring connection between space, knowledge, and human progress. It is a tribute to the architects of ancient knowledge who, with their creative designs, sought to bridge the tangible and the spiritual, preserving the wisdom of the ages within the structures they built. As we traverse the hallowed halls and tranquil grounds of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila, we seek to uncover how these library buildings have transcended time and space to become repositories of eternal knowledge.

Review of Literature:

Gopalakrishna Dhruvaraja Kamalapur (2021) begins by highlighting that the roots of ancient Indian education can be traced back to Takshashila, the world's first university. This institution thrived from the 5th century BCE to the 7th century AD. However, it faced numerous attacks, leading to a decline in significance. Recognizing the imminent threat to the preservation of knowledge and education, teachers and scholars from Takshashila relocated to other parts of the world to ensure the continuity of their educational traditions. They then focused on the establishment of Nalanda, which took place during the reign of King Chandragupta Maurya of the Maurya dynasty. Nalanda became the torchbearer of the educational legacy that began at Takshashila, representing a new chapter in the history of ancient Indian education. The article explores various aspects, such as the inception of Nalanda, the admission process, the teaching and learning methods employed, and the key factors contributing to its sustainability. Additionally, it addresses the eventual decline of Nalanda, shedding light on the complex historical journey of these renowned educational institutions. In summary, this article offers a glimpse into the transition and evolution of ancient Indian education from the era of Takshashila to the rise of Nalanda, covering crucial elements of its history, methods, and eventual decline.

In this article, Jandhyala B. G. Tilak (2020) discusses the changing concept of universities over several centuries, highlighting the dynamic nature of this change. He emphasizes the emergence of new generations of universities and the clear distinctions between ancient, modern, and medieval ones. The article also underscores the importance of learning from the history of ancient universities, particularly in India. By studying the nature, scope, coverage, planning, funding, teacher-student relations, and institution-community relations of these ancient institutions, valuable lessons can be drawn to inform the development of universities in the 21st century. The focus is on extracting essential insights from the historical experiences of ancient Indian universities that can guide the evolution of contemporary higher education institutions.

Rajani M. B. (2016) points to Nalanda as a renowned Buddhist monastery that endured from the 4th or 5th century to at least the 12th century. This study employs satellite images to investigate the Nalanda area for evidence of extensive historical human activity. The findings suggest Nalanda's spatial footprint surpasses the Archaeological Survey of India's protected area. The investigation reveals traces

of additional temples and monasteries and a substantial archaeological structure beneath Begumpur, potentially connected to the Nalanda complex or an independent entity.

Objectives of the study:

- 1) To explore the historical significance and contributions of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila as ancient centres of learning and knowledge dissemination.
- 2) To examine the architectural evolution and design of libraries within these educational institutions, focusing on how these structures contributed to preserving and disseminating knowledge.
- 3) To investigate the library systems and cataloguing practices employed at Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila to understand how these systems influenced the organization and accessibility of ancient manuscripts.
- 4) To analyze the impact of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila on the development of multidisciplinary education and the dissemination of diverse knowledge across cultural and geographical boundaries.
- 5) To examine the enduring effect of these ancient educational centres on con-temporary scholarship, library management, and the library and information science field.
- 6) To explore these libraries' cultural and historical significance, considering their architectural grandeur, cataloguing systems, and the reverence with which they were held.
- 7) To highlight the enduring importance of libraries in ancient educational centres, emphasizing their role in preserving and disseminating knowledge, supporting research, and fostering intellectual growth.
- 8) To provide insights into the holistic knowledge approach of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila and how it influenced subsequent educational practices and curriculum development.

Methodology:

In this study, we delved deeply into the existing body of knowledge and care-fully examined its contents to support our research claims with solid evidence. Our research method relied on effectively utilizing the observation method to gather a comprehensive range of previous literature from several trustworthy sources, such as ProQuest (LISA), Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Additionally, we broadened our search for ideas by incorporating various sources. To ensure a thorough investigation of every aspect of the study area, we meticulously divided it into distinct sections and selected numerous articles from these sources using a diverse range of search terms.

Guardians of Knowledge and Information Retrieval:

The ancient Indian universities of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila were not only institutions of learning but also guardians of knowledge, holding vast stores of manuscripts, scholarly works, and philosophical treatises. These universities were instrumental in continuing intellectual traditions by preserving and passing on knowledge from generation to generation. The libraries contained vast collections of religious texts, scientific manuscripts, and literary compositions that drew scholars from all over Asia. Such detailed archives testify to their dedication to systematically preserving and sharing knowledge.

One of the most impressive features of these ancient libraries was their information organization and retrieval systems. Whereas contemporary libraries depend on cataloging and classification systems like the Dewey Decimal System, such libraries developed individualized approaches to dealing with their

enormous collections. Manuscripts were frequently sorted according to subject content, script, or lineage of authorship to guarantee that scholars could access pertinent texts with relative ease. Furthermore, oral tradition contributed to knowledge retrieval, with scholars and instructors relying upon memorization and recitation to solidify their learning. According to some records, trained scholars and scribes served as guardians of learning, helping students find texts and copying seminal works.

The impact of these ancient learning centers carries over into the present day, influencing contemporary library science and information management. The focus on safeguarding manuscripts, classifying knowledge systematically, and enabling scholarly communication parallels today's digital libraries and archival systems. The problems of the ancient institutions, including safeguarding documents from natural deterioration and making them accessible, continue to guide library management practices today. Numerous principles of knowledge organization in these libraries, thematic classification, and the value of open-access learning, for in-stance, have influenced contemporary librarianship and digital preservation methods.

Therefore, the Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila libraries were not only filled with books but also advanced intellectual centers, research institutions, and centers of knowledge acquisition. Their enduring legacy serves as a testament to libraries' timeless value in shaping societies' academic and cultural landscape. The methodologies they employed continue to offer insights into the evolving field of library and information science, reinforcing the idea that libraries, both ancient and modern, remain the true guardians of knowledge.

The Glorious Legacy of Taxila, Nalanda and Vikramashila:

The annals of history show how education, science, and culture have greatly affected societies' futures. In India, an old country with many different cultures, three great learning places rose to prominence as lights of wisdom, attracting scholars, philosophers, and people who want to learn from all over the world. Three famous educational institutions, Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila, showed how much people wanted to know and played vital parts in developing human thinking, educational methods, and the art of passing on and keeping information. These ancient institutions, some more than a thousand years old, were the pinnacle of Indian learning and became places where students and teachers alike would go to deepen their understanding. Each of these educational centres of Nalanda, where Buddhist philosophy and the arts thrived, the historical classrooms of Taxila, known for their multidisciplinary approach to education, and the Tantric wisdom of Vikramashila showed a different part of India's rich intellectual history. These things continue to inspire and inform us how we think about education and library management today. Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila left a legacy that continues to encourage students and people interested in library and in-formation science today. It is a timeless lesson in how to preserve, retrieve, and disseminate knowledge.

Taxila: The Center of Ancient Education:

The ancient city of Taxila is located in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent and is characterized by rugged terrain and abundant rivers. Taxila's history, spanning over 2,000 years, exemplifies the enduring power of knowledge and its impact on human history. Revered by experts and scholars, Taxila was a learning hub where the pursuit of knowledge was considered an art form. Situated in pre-sent-day Pakistan, this ancient institution predated Greek influences and bore the marks of extensive intellectual and cultural exchanges. Its location on a historic trade route between the Indus River and the Gandhara region made it an ideal meeting place for philosophers from around the ancient world.

Taxila, particularly noted for its contributions to science, medicine, and the arts, attracted students from distant parts of India, Central Asia, and Afghanistan. The Jataka tales frequently mention nobles and Brahmins travelling to Taxila for education. Graduating from Taxila was considered an honour, and physicians trained there were highly esteemed. Notable figures like Panini, the great grammarian, and other prominent personalities like Chandragupta Maurya, Kautilya, and Bimbisara studied at Taxila.

The university offered various subjects, including Chaturveda, Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda, literature, painting, sculpture, and more. Taxila's integrated approach to education, combining intellectual, spiritual, artistic, linguistic, and scientific disciplines, left a lasting educational legacy.

The architecture of Taxila reflected the reverence for knowledge, with its im-pressive library system preserving and disseminating a vast collection of books. These libraries became sanctuaries of learning, attracting students and scholars eager to explore deep intellectual thoughts. As we examine into Taxila's rich history, we aim to uncover this ancient educational centre's unique architecture and historical significance and its crucial role in developing library systems and information retrieval methods. Taxila, as a con-fluence of diverse cultures and knowledge, invites us to explore its ancient treasures, reminding us that pursuing knowledge has always been a shared human endeavour, bridging the gaps between ancient and modern studies.

Nalanda: The Ancient Seat of Learning:

Nalanda University was started by the efforts of the royal family; the Buddha Vihara was opened near the palace in Bihar. The place was the "Baragava" village between the towns of Patna and Gaya, the present capital of Bihar. The surrounding area of Lepa and Baragava villages, were fertile and hence the people were rich. It is located between the royal palace of the then capital of Magadha and the Pataliputra. Nalanda is 93 km from Patna (Smith, F. H. 2013) The name 'Nalanda' evokes the ancient knowledge that flourished in what is now Bihar, India, situated in the region's lush green plains. Nalanda is often called the 'world's first residential university,' which exemplifies humanity's enduring passion for learning. Founded in the 5th century CE with the support of the Gupta Empire, Nalanda quickly became a vibrant centre for study, philosophy, and faith. It was a sanctuary where scholars, philosophers, and dreamers from around the world gathered to exchange ideas and explore life's mysteries.

Nalanda's students were as diverse as the subjects they studied. While Buddhist teachings were central, the curriculum encompassed science, mathematics, medicine, literature, the arts, and languages. This broad educational approach transcended any ideology, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and comprehensive education. The architecture of Nalanda reflected the importance placed on knowledge, with a sprawling campus featuring tall libraries, monastic cells, and grand stupas housing a vast collection of manuscripts and texts. The libraries, known for their extensive resources, attracted students from near and far.

Nalanda University played a significant role in enhancing India's global reputation. Its architectural marvels included advanced mechanisms for detecting wind and rain direction alongside intricate paintings and sculptures. The roofs were adorned with dragon figures, and three main buildings housed the sacred texts, collectively known as "Dharma Ganja." Nalanda reached its peak during the Gup-ta period.

As we explore the hallowed halls of Nalanda, we seek to understand its architectural and historical significance and its contribution to the development of library systems and the pursuit of knowledge.

Nalanda University, despite the world of higher learning having undergone a seismic shift, with a plethora of universities and institutions of global excellence. It is in this context that he makes a very moot point about the nature of Nalanda: “The tradition of Nalanda was not only that of quality education itself a matter of great importance in India today but also one of global cooperation and a systematic attempt to learn across the barriers of regions and countries. What the Singaporeans call ‘the Nalanda trail’ was a flow of ideas and contacts that brought people from different countries and different cultural backgrounds together. It was easy to see how profoundly that commitment was inspired by Gautam Buddha’s focused on enlightenment without borders. Nalanda’s legacy continues to influence modern research and library science. The ruins of this ancient Buddhist establishment, located near Bargaon, about 55 miles southeast of Patna and seven miles north of Rajgir, remind us of the rich tapestry of knowledge that shaped its destiny and left an indelible mark on the history of education worldwide (Kamalapur, G. D. 2021)

Vikramashila: A Hub of Knowledge

Many ancient learning centres once thrived in what is now Bihar, India, and Vikramashila stands out as one of the most beautiful and significant among them. Though less well-known than Taxila and Nalanda, Vikramashila has a unique and fascinating history. Established during the Pala era in the late 800s CE by King Dharmapala, this institution was dedicated to learning and knowledge acquisition. Vikramashila, named to evoke bravery and determination, was a beacon of education and spiritual growth. Vikramashila specialized in the profound teachings of Buddhism and Tantra, setting itself apart by combining religious and intellectual pursuits. It allowed students to explore profound philosophical ideas and engage in spiritual practices, becoming renowned for its blend of intellectual and spiritual activities. The architecture of Vikramashila reflected its dual focus on creativity and spirituality, featuring monk cells, stupas, and prayer halls that created a tranquil environment for reflection and study. The university’s commitment to preserving and disseminating knowledge was evident in its extensive library of sacred texts and manuscripts.

Vikramashila uncover its historical significance, architectural beauty, and sophisticated information systems. Vikramashila invites us to appreciate its unique fusion of ideas and wisdom, reminding us that knowledge and spiritual growth can coexist to enhance human development and happiness.

Importance of Libraries in Ancient Educational Centres:

Since the beginning, libraries have been the silent guardians of knowledge, preserving intellectual records of past societies and fostering the pursuit of wisdom. In ancient educational centres like Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila, libraries played a crucial role.

- a. **Preservation of Knowledge:** Libraries in these institutions housed numerous manuscripts, texts, and scrolls, safeguarding the knowledge of past civilizations. Protecting these fragile documents was vital for ensuring that intellectual treasures were preserved for future generations.
- b. **Dissemination of Knowledge:** Libraries were not merely storage places but hubs for sharing knowledge. They attracted numerous students and scholars, facilitating the exchange of information and ideas.
- c. **Access to Multidisciplinary Learning:** Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila libraries were known for their extensive collections on various subjects. This diversity allowed students and researchers to explore multiple disciplines, fostering a comprehensive educational experience.
- d. **Fostering Intellectual Dialogue:** Scholars worldwide visited these libraries, making them centres for intellectual dialogue. These interactions often led to deep discussions and debates, enriching

the academic environment.

- e. **Influence on Curriculum:** The contents of these libraries shaped the educational curricula of the institutions. The availability of certain texts and the popularity of specific authors influenced the lines of study, highlighting the libraries' role in setting educational goals.
- f. **Support for Research and Innovation:** Libraries provide essential resources for scholars to conduct groundbreaking research and explore new ideas. They supported academic inquiry by offering access to ancient texts and fostering innovative thinking.
- g. **Cultural and Historical Significance:** Libraries were not only centres of learning but also symbols of intellectual strength. Their architectural beauty, meticulous cataloguing systems, and the respect they commanded added to these educational sites' cultural and historical significance.

The libraries of ancient educational centres like Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila were integral to their institutions, embodying the principles of preservation, dissemination, and intellectual exploration. They remain enduring models for modern library and information science, illustrating the timeless importance of libraries for learning and growth.

Key features of library buildings:

These elements of library buildings in ancient educational institutions were both functional and culturally significant. Their architectural beauty and thoughtful design have left a lasting impact on education and library science.

- a. **Architectural Grandeur:** The architecture of these library buildings was awe-inspiring, featuring grand entrances, ornate frames, and intricate details that reflected a deep respect for learning.
- b. **Sturdy Construction:** Constructed with durable materials like stone and brick, these libraries were built to last, ensuring their longevity.
- c. **Spacious Layout:** Libraries were designed with ample space, including large reading rooms, study areas, and lecture halls, accommodating many scholars.
- d. **Monastic Cells:** Many libraries included adjacent monastic cells where students and scholars could reside, providing a quiet and peaceful environment for study and research.
- e. **Storage for Manuscripts:** Special storage areas were designed to protect the vast collections of manuscripts, books, and texts from damage, loss, or theft.
- f. **Shelving and Cataloging Systems:** Libraries featured organized shelving and cataloging systems, making it easier for scholars to locate specific works.
- g. **Natural Light and Ventilation:** Large windows and open spaces allowed for natural light and ventilation, creating a pleasant atmosphere for reading and study.
- h. **Stupas and Religious Symbols:** Some library buildings included stupas and religious symbols, enhancing their sacred and revered status.
- i. **Privacy and Quiet Spaces:** Libraries offered private rooms and quiet areas, essential for focused academic work.
- j. **Accessibility and Entrances:** Multiple entrances facilitated easy access for teachers and students, often featuring elaborate gates and inscriptions.
- k. **Aesthetic Elements:** Walls were adorned with statues and designs celebrating learning and culture, adding to the libraries' cultural significance.
- l. **Security Measures:** Security measures, including guards, locks, and monitoring, were implemented to protect valuable texts.

Historical Significance of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila:

The historic learning hubs of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila are crucial threads in humanity's history, illustrating the profound impact of knowledge and culture on societal growth. Their historical significance is evident from various perspectives:

- a. **Pioneering Knowledge Hubs:** Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila were early centres of severe study and teaching, setting the stage for systematically pursuing and disseminating knowledge.
- b. **Cultural Crossroads:** Located along ancient trade routes, these institutions became cultural centres where travelers, scholars, and philosophers from around the world met, facilitating the exchange of ideas, beliefs, and practices.
- c. **Preservation of Texts:** These sites were vital in preserving a vast collection of ancient books and manuscripts, safeguarding intellectual traditions that might otherwise have been lost to history.
- d. **Influence on Subsequent Learning:** The curricula and teaching methods of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila greatly influenced later educational institutions, promoting diverse and inclusive education that continues to shape modern teaching.
- e. **Multicultural and Multilingual Environments:** These hubs were known for their inclusivity, attracting scholars from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds and fostering an environment of acceptance and collaboration.
- f. **Spiritual Centers:** These sites were also spiritual centres and educational institutions. Nalanda, in particular, was closely associated with Buddhism and became a significant centre for Buddhist studies.
- g. **Architectural Marvels:** The impressive architecture of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila reflects the advanced art and engineering of their times, and their buildings remain valued for their historical and cultural significance.
- h. **Decline and Legacy:** Though these hubs eventually declined due to attacks and historical changes, their legacy endures through historical records, inscriptions, and the influence they have had on modern educational institutions.

The ruins and artefacts of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila highlight their historical importance and lasting impact on education, learning, and the preservation of human knowledge. These ancient sites symbolize the enduring pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment that has connected people throughout history.

Conclusion:

The enduring legacies of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila underscore the importance of education, knowledge, and cultural exchange in societal growth. Often hailed as the world's first universities, these ancient learning centres were more than mere schools; they were hubs of intellectual debate and enlightenment for students worldwide. Their great libraries, monastic cells, stupas, and magnificent architecture reflected the high value placed on knowledge.

These libraries were not just repositories of texts but dynamic centres where people from various regions shared information and engaged in scholarly conversations. Beyond their historical significance, these sites preserved ancient texts and fostered diverse education. They exemplify the rise and fall of civilizations, illustrating how external forces and historical shifts impact educational institutions. Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila's significance extends to modern research, library management, and library and information science. Their enduring relevance highlights libraries' essential role in pursuing knowledge. Revisiting these ancient sites allows us to appreciate their architectural splendor, understand

their historical importance, and recognize the unifying power of education and the preservation of wisdom.

The history of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramashila demonstrates humanity's timeless quest for understanding and the ability of education to connect people across ages. Walking through these ancient halls reminds us that pursuing knowledge is a noble and enduring human endeavour, continually guiding those who seek to comprehend and transform the world.



Fig 1: (Ruins of Nalanda University) <https://www.gettyimages.in/photos/nalanda-university>

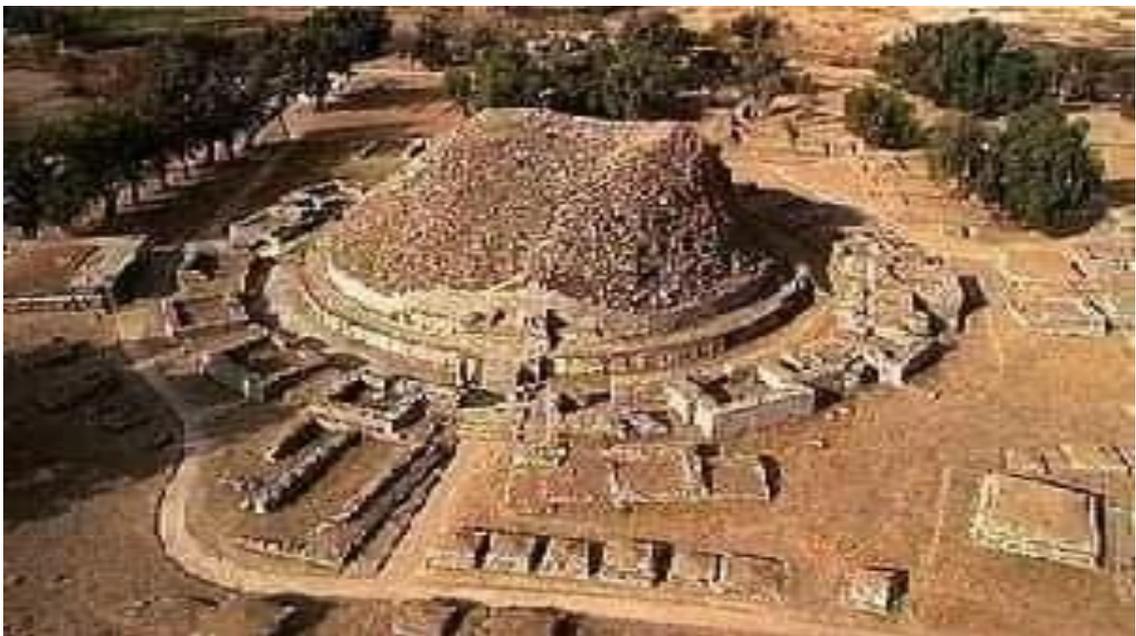


Fig 2: (Ruins of Taxila University) https://medium.com/@gijovijayan_22826/takshashila-the-worlds-first-known-university-and-sanskrit-was-the-main-medium-of-teaching-45db18942097



Fig 3: (Sariputra Stupa, Nalanda) <https://www.gettyimages.in/photos/nalanda-university>

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